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ABSTRACT

Folk and settlement schools have served predominantly Anglo-American constituents and have focused upon Anglo-American and western European traditions. The John C. Campbell Folk School (JCCFS) was founded in southwestern North Carolina in 1925. The school's founder, Olive Dame Campbell, was considered progressive in her time in desiring to serve "all that is native and fine" in the indigenous cultural community. However, the decades of cultural movement and change that have intervened since then have given a new basis for today's strivings toward cultural diversity, so that it is only fitting that in the 1990s folk schools as institutions of educational and progressive thought should embrace cultural diversity and educational democracy, by including people other than Anglo-Americans as faculty, staff, and students. Doing this will create a new set of concerns and options for folk school educators and programmers in institutions. While a vast percentage of the students and instructors from JCFFS are outsiders to the school community, current staff and faculty have a strong respect for the community and have re-instituted events for the local residents such as Friday night concerts featuring local singers and musicians. Cultural democracy is the right of each individual to garner an education and to have a voice both in what type of education that will be, and in how cultural activities will be highlighted, showcased, documented, and/or preserved. Folkschools are progressive institutions born of forward thinking, humanistic concerns, and love; yet if folk schools are to continue in service and growth, forward thinking by staff, instructors, and boards of directors must be tempered by public need, student response and contemporary shifts in culture. (LP)

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Present understanding of democracy requires re-thinking of some historical trends in folk education. . . .

Cultural Democracy, Folk Schools and Community Development: Some Ethical and Philosophical Issues

by David A. Brose, Manager of Folklore Program
John C. Campbell Folk School

The John C. Campbell Folk School (JCCFS) was founded in southwestern North Carolina, the community of Brasstown, Cherokee County, in 1925. The school's founder, Olive Dame Campbell, carried a desire to serve "all that is native and fine" in the indigenous cultural community, with a stated objective to "improve the lives of local residents through the empowerment realized from education and holistic enlightenment of body, mind and spirit." These were noble, humanistic and progressive thoughts.

Yet from a spatial and temporal perspective some sixty-five years after the folk school's founding, new questions arise. In 1992, how far-reaching is our constituent community, by whose worldview will programming continue to be carried forth, what are our local resident's current needs for empowerment and education, and who will decide the nature of the changing educational philosophies behind such an institution? In the following paragraphs, I hope to raise a few questions and reflect upon current paradigms, as the JCCFS (and indeed, all folk and settlement schools) enters into a new century of service to constituents.

Olive Dame Campbell heard mountain ballads at the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky, December, 1908. She was fascinated by the power and quality of these ballads, and began to collect ballads and folksongs during journeys with her husband, John C. Campbell, taking the couple throughout eastern Tennessee, northern Georgia and western North Carolina, among other regions. In 1916, Mrs. Campbell aided British scholar Cecil Sharp in his collecting efforts among the residents of Appalachia. The results of their collaboration culminated in the monumental English Folksongs of the Southern Appalachians (1917), which stands today

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as an often cited and important regional collection of balladry. During a period of history in which THE BALLAD as canonized by Francis James Child was seen by some to be the pinnacle in folk poetics, Mrs. Campbell was progressive in including folksong and other ballads native to American soil, which fall outside the parameters which Child had established.

Current (1992) trends have broadened our perspecives. Native-Americans (Cherokee) of Cherokee County have long-standing sacred and secular song and music traditions. Similarly, above the town of Murphy, some six miles from the JCCFS, is an African-American community known as Texana, extraordinarily rich in the visual, performing and oral-literary arts.

The intellectual perspective and worldview of the early 20th century focused generally upon Anglo-American and western European traditions. Folkloric collectors and other scholars of this period did not as a rule look toward African-American or Native-American persons for "things cultural." Certain exceptions to this perception included anthropologists, linguists, and musical composers (to name a few), who did investigate non-western-European cultures and attempted to analyze the material which they found, for the use and enjoyment of persons of an Anglo-American heritage. In this light, in 1925 it was somewhat culturally diverse for Olive Dame Campbell to look toward Denmark for the folk school models upon which the JCCFS and other folk schools were founded.

In 1992, current humanistic strivings toward cultural diversity are based upon decades of cultural movement(s) and change in federal, state and local governments, and educational institutions of all varieties. Therefore, it is only fitting that our folk schools as institutions of educational and progressive thought embrace these concerns of cultural diversity and educational democracy, and look increasingly toward people of color as faculty, staff and students. As simple and "politically correct" as this may sound, it will prove to create a new set of concerns and options for us as folk school educators and programmers in institutions which have served predominantly Anglo-American constituents since our founding(s).

As we approach a new century, *all* folk institutions must seek new philosophies, paradigms and methods of service to constituents. Clearly, the world functions as a very different place than when such folk and settlement schools were first established and were often the only institutions offering health service, "new" agricultural methods and classes for the furthered education of local residents.

The JCFFS was built upon land donated by local residents, with materials and labor donated from the local community. Historically and ethically, then, the JCCFS is indebted to the community.

Olive Dame Campbell's original desire was to teach local residents skills which could be used for their financial and spiritual enrichment, while celebrating "all that is native and fine." Yet a vast percentage of the institution's students were and continue to be "outsiders" to the Brasstown community, as have been many of the instructors. Clearly, the JCCFS continues to play a vital role also in the lives of these "outsiders," who deserve to come and to secure professional development. The financial stability of such folk schools indeed depends upon these tuitions.

Today, the term *community* can transcend the physical, political boundaries of place and can indeed be used to identify a group of persons who share similar traditions, interests, obsessions and skills. For instance, is the group of bluegrass and/or "old time" music devotees who grace festivals from Telluride, Colorado to Union Grove, North Carolina, and from Mariposa, Canada to El Paso, Texas not a community of sorts? Similarly, are not the dance enthusiasts who meet at many locations throughout the United States for "dance camps" not a community formed of mind, spirit and body? In this light, the JCCFS does serve a community, those students who come from regions throughout the world and share a love for and obsession with their favored dance, music, art, craft and folkloric genres.

Yet the JCCFS continues to rest upon land in Cherokee County, and students, staff and faculty daily interact with our neighbors at Clay Logan's Brasstown General Store (Opossum Capitol of the World), at Carl Green's gasoline station (best "fix it" garage between Murphy, NC and Young Harris, GA) and at a great variety of stores, restaurants and meeting places in Murphy, NC, some six miles from the folk school. In this light, some of the same perceived differences between "insider" and "outsider" which have existed in Brasstown since the inception of the JCCFS do continue currently. Certain tensions which existed in the past are being eased by current staff and faculty, who have a strong respect for the local community and have re-instituted events for the local residents such as Friday night concerts featuring local singers and musicians, Saturday night dances held bi-weekly, and calendar-holiday events such as a Spring egg hunt for children and a Winter holiday supper honoring elder residents.

We speak, then, of cultural democracy. We speak of the right for each individual to garner an education, to have a voice in what type of education that will be, and in how cultural activities will be highlighted, showcased, documented and/or preserved. If these important decisions are left solely for community members to carry out, perhaps their goals would not be met, due to a possible lack of managerial or educational knowledge on the part of persons from that immediate community. If left up to an "outsider," however, then the meaning of cultural democracy could be restructured to become cultural intervention and imperialism, such that our local western North Carolina children might not distinguish their own native square and line dances from the Danish peasant costumes and imported maypole dances which they (in the past) were encouraged to believe should be part of "all that is native and fine" in their culture.

The goal to serve indigenous art is especially hard to achieve in the process of education by and for the people interested in folk artists and folk art. Most often, folk artists do not consider themselves to be artists. Yet they create fantastic and beautiful objects to make their homes more personal--fantastic and beautiful dances and music to make more personal their time here on Earth. As students, educators, keepers, documenters and watchers of traditions, we should take the same approach to making personal a future generation's understanding of the past and present, not on our terms, but on the terms and conditions of the people for whom our folk schools were first developed, and the traditions which belong to them, their families and community members.

In times of tight budgets, our society talks of economic impact and tourism. As a new century approaches, let's take care that our folk schools themselves are not merely havens for tourists, as compared to and kept in balance with the needs of our local citizenry toward an education and spiritual enrichment. We speak of belief in the creative process and potential; spiritual enrichment and love--all philosophies of the Grundtvigian movement which formed the basis for Danish folk schools. I hope that as administrators of folk schools we have not allowed ourselves to be dominated more by past and familiar educational models than by our current passions--the reason that we're attracted to the beliefs and ideals of cultural democracy, diversity and pluralism in the first place. We should recall that our folk schools are themselves progressive institutions born of forward thinking, humanistic concerns and love. This forward thinking by staff, instructors, and boards of directors must be tempered by public need, student response and contemporary shifts in culture, if we as

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folk schools are to continue in service and growth. We speak of quality of life. Perhaps a useful description of such quality is respect for people and the natural environment, and thus respect for the traditions and resources created by human beings who continue to change and evolve.

From the perspective of 1992, those of us involved in folk schools and folk education must continue with such forward thinking and find new models and methods to serve an everchanging global culture.

Worded simply, western European thought and the Anglo-American traditions which have formed the basis for much of the folk school curriculum and programming in this century must now be kept in balance with an ever growing populace representing many world cultures and a vast array of visual, literary and performance traditions. It is a recognized fact that English-speaking, Anglo-American students will be in the minority in most urban primary and secondary schools by the early 21st century. This same phenomenon will pose new programming and educational needs for our folk schools, which represented Anglo-American traditions and served predominantly Anglo-American students throughout much of the 20th century.

In these few pages, I have posed several questions which cannot be easily answered, but which do need consideration as folk and settlement schools move toward a new century, and as the educators at those schools prepare to teach a new generation for whom past models of Anglo-American-dominated traditions in the United States are no longer a cultural "norm." As educators and administrators of folk schools in a world much changed from the early 20th century, we must continue to evolve and learn from the best of past rhetoric, retaining the meaning of "all that is native and fine" to be applied toward new and culturally diverse constituents. These current and future considerations must be based upon a new and ever diversifying concept of need, quality and worldview; paradigms that will serve our local residents as well as the greater community of global humankind.

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